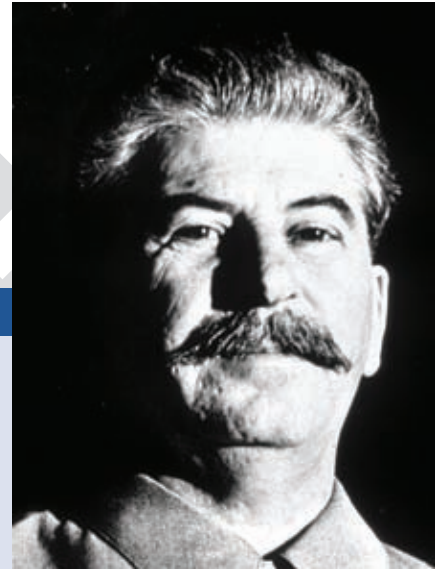


One of the most important leaders of the **USSR** during the 20th century, Josef Stalin established the political and economic structure that remained in place until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This chapter will cover Stalin's rise to power and how he was able to consolidate his control of the USSR both before and after World War II.



Josef Stalin

#### Timeline – 1879–1953

- 1879** Stalin is born on 21 December in the town of Gori in Georgia, Russia.
- 1894** Stalin enters Tiflis Theological Seminary.
- 1898** The Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDLP) is established.
- 1899** Stalin is expelled from Tiflis Seminary.
- 1902** Stalin is involved in illegal political activity; he is arrested and exiled to Siberia.
- 1903** The RSDLP splits into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.
- 1905** Revolution breaks out in Russia; Stalin meets Lenin for the first time.
- 1914** World War I breaks out.
- 1917** The March Revolution takes place in Russia; Tsar Nicholas II abdicates; Lenin returns to Petrograd in April; Stalin arrives in Petrograd and becomes one of the editors of *Pravda*. The Bolshevik Revolution takes place in October; Stalin is appointed Commissar for Nationalities.
- 1918** The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is signed with Germany; civil war breaks out in Russia; Stalin is placed in charge of Red Army forces in Tsaritsyn.
- 1921** The New Economic Policy is introduced.
- 1922** The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is founded; Stalin is appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party.
- 1924** Lenin dies in January; the 'troika' oppose Trotsky; Stalin proposes his theory of 'Socialism in One Country'.
- 1925** Stalin opposes the Left Opposition.
- 1926** Stalin opposes the United Opposition.
- 1927** Stalin proposes the Five Year Plan and collectivization.
- 1929** Stalin opposes the Right Deviationists; forced collectivization takes place.
- 1930** Stalin makes his 'Dizzy with Success' speech.
- 1931–32** Famine in the Soviet Union.
- 1934** Kirov is murdered.
- 1936** The show trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev – both are executed; Tomsy commits suicide.
- 1937** Stalin purges the military; the beginning of the 'Great Terror'.
- 1938** The show trial of Bukharin and Rykov – both are executed.
- 1939** The Great Terror draws to a close; the Nazi–Soviet Pact is signed; World War II breaks out in Europe.
- 1940** Trotsky is assassinated in August.
- 1941** Operation *Barbarossa* begins on 22 June.
- 1943** Turning point of the war, as Germans are defeated at Stalingrad.
- 1945** Stalin meets with Churchill and Roosevelt in February at Yalta; war ends in Europe in May; post-war meeting at Potsdam with Attlee and Truman; the Red Army occupies much of Central and Eastern Europe; the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August; the war in the Pacific ends in September.
- 1948** The Berlin Blockade.
- 1949** The People's Republic of China is established.
- 1950** The Korean War breaks out in June.
- 1953** Stalin dies on 5 March.



#### The USSR

Known in 1918 as the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics (the Soviet Union), the name was changed to the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in 1922. Lenin achieved his aim of allowing each republic to be equal and also to have the right to secede if they chose to do so. In fact, of course, power lay in Moscow and secession was not allowed, certainly not after Stalin took over. In 1936, the number of republics was increased to 11: Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tadzhikistan.

### The Bolsheviks

In 1903, at a conference held in London, there was a disagreement among the leaders of the Social Democratic Workers' Party between those who favoured a broadly based mass party (Mensheviks) and those who wanted a small, 'vanguard' party that would lead the workers towards a revolution (Bolsheviks).

### ● Examiner's hint

Exam questions in Topic 3 of Paper 2 will often ask about either the rise to power or the maintenance of power by a single-party leader, and Stalin can be a good example to choose. Do avoid using him, however, if the question asks about the emergence of a single-party state as, in the USSR, it was Lenin and not Stalin that established a single-party state.

## Section I:

### Origins and nature of authoritarian and single-party states – the USSR

Josef Stalin was not primarily responsible for the establishment of a single-party state in Russia. He was a **Bolshevik** and a member of the political party that carried out the October Revolution, but it was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) who set up the structure of what became known the USSR. Stalin is, however, associated with the consolidation of the USSR and it was his policies that became the model for all future communist states.

### What was Stalin's background and what was his role in the establishment of a single-party state in Russia?

#### Stalin before the Bolshevik Revolution

One of the most notorious single-party leaders of the 20th century, Josef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili (Stalin) was born in 1879 in Gori, Georgia. Although part of the Russian Empire, Georgians had their own language and culture, and for Stalin Russian was a second language that he always spoke with a heavy accent. Rebellious at school, he later attended a theological seminary; this was not an unusual path for intelligent but impoverished young men who wanted an education. Stalin became influenced, however, by **Messame Dassy**, a revolutionary group that wanted to secure Georgia's independence from Russia. Through this organization, he met socialists whose ideology was based on **Marxism**. Stalin was expelled from the seminary in 1899 and in 1901 he joined the **Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDLP)** and became a professional revolutionary.

#### Messame Dassy

A secret organization that wanted Georgia to gain independence from the Russian Empire. It was also socialist in its politics.

#### Marxism

Based upon the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism formed the basis of the political ideology of the Communist Party. Central to this ideology is the belief that history shows that whoever owns the means of production of wealth controls all aspects of society. In feudal times, for example, whoever owned the land controlled wealth and power and structured society to benefit themselves. When wealth shifted to those who owned the means of industrial production (the bourgeoisie or middle classes), social and political power also shifted to the middle classes. Marx predicted that the workers (the proletariat), whose labour was exploited by the bourgeoisie, would rise up to seize power and to establish the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This would lead to the final stage of communism, a time when there would be no private property and resources would be shared.

#### The Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDLP)

This political party was set up in Minsk in 1898 and focused on the role of the workers (proletariat) in the overthrow of the autocratic system in Russia. Almost immediately, the leaders were arrested and sent into exile. Lenin, among others, went abroad.

Unlike leaders such as Lenin, Stalin did not go abroad into exile, but stayed behind in Russia and became involved in organizing strikes among factory workers. Arrested for this in 1902, Stalin was sent into exile in Siberia, although he was able to escape in 1904. He first met Lenin in Finland in 1905 and sided firmly with the Bolsheviks. Stalin was arrested several times by the Tsar's secret police, before finally, in 1913, being sentenced to exile for

life. Stalin remained in Siberia until 1917, when the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty led to the establishment of the Provisional Government and the subsequent release of all political prisoners.

## What role did Stalin play in the 1917 revolution?

Stalin returned to Petrograd (St Petersburg) in 1917 when he became part of the editorial board of *Pravda*, a post he had previously held in 1913. He was also elected to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party.

The Bolsheviks were a minority party in the early months of 1917, but Lenin's leadership and events over the summer gave it a lot of publicity and a reputation for being the only party to oppose consistently Russia's involvement in World War I. Lenin, as the leader of the Bolsheviks, also strongly opposed any collaboration between the **Petrograd soviet** and the Provisional Government.

'Land, Peace and Bread' and 'All Power to the Soviets' became the catchphrases of the Bolsheviks, but these also signified a departure from the policies adopted before Lenin returned to Petrograd. As one of the editors of *Pravda*, Stalin was caught up in a struggle within the Bolshevik Party. Lenin criticized editorials that had supported the war and even accused Stalin of being a 'betrayal of socialism'. Stalin was quickly persuaded to change his approach, to abandon support for the Provisional Government and the war and to work towards the revolution. Despite his rather senior position within the party, Stalin did not take a leading role in the October Revolution, as the planning of this was mostly the work of **Trotsky** and Lenin.

### SOURCE A

*In the days of the upheaval, Stalin was not among its main actors. Even more than usual, he remained in the shadow, a fact that was to cause embarrassment to his official biographers and perhaps justified Trotsky in saying that 'the greater the sweep of events the smaller was Stalin's place in it'... But in spite of their best intentions and indubitable zeal, the official Soviet historians have not been able to write Stalin's name or anyone else's into the blanks left by the deletion of Trotsky's.*

From Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, 1966

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

- What does Source A tell you about Deutscher's views on Stalin?
- What does he mean by 'official Soviet historians'?
- What is significant about the date when this was first published?

## The Bolshevik Revolution

The October Revolution of 1917 marked the seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party. The traditional Soviet view of the events of October 1917 was that it was a popular uprising expertly led by Lenin and his supporters. Other interpretations suggest it was a *coup d'état* by a small group of determined revolutionaries with limited popular support. More recently, assisted by access to the Soviet archives, historians have leaned more towards interpreting the revolution as popular unrest combined with dynamic leadership from the Bolsheviks. This party of revolutionaries was able to harness enough support to get itself

### **Pravda**

This was the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Its name means, 'The Truth'.

### **Petrograd soviet**

The Petrograd soviet was a council composed of representatives elected by the soldiers stationed in Petrograd and by ordinary workers. It was intended to represent the views of the proletariat. During the February/March (depending on the calendar) Revolution of 1917, the Duma refused to disband when asked to do so by the Tsar. Demonstrations in Petrograd, a mutiny by the army and growing discontent with the rule of Tsar Nicholas II led to his abdication. The Duma became the Provisional Government and it shared power with the Petrograd soviet that was set up in March 1917.

### **Leon Trotsky (Lev Bronstein) (1879–1940)**

Lev Bronstein was a Marxist who became the first chairman of the St Petersburg soviet in 1905. This was quickly suppressed by the Tsar, but Trotsky (his *nom de guerre*) took up journalism and reported on the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. He was in New York when the February Revolution took place in 1917 and returned to Petrograd to hover on the edges of the Bolshevik Party, although he did not join until the summer. A brilliant strategist, he planned the October Revolution and became a close comrade of Lenin. By 1923, it was widely expected that he would also be Lenin's successor.

### Sovnarkom (The Council of People's Commissars)

The overthrow of the Provisional Government meant that it had to be replaced by a temporary government until elections could be held. Sovnarkom was the name of the council made up of 15 commissars or ministers. Lenin was the Chairman, Trotsky was the Commissar for Foreign Affairs and Stalin was named the Commissar for Nationalities.



into power and to stay there long enough to build the structure of a single-party state, after which popular support was no longer so important. Soon after the October Revolution, the Decree for Land and the Decree for Peace were issued in response to popular demand. Also issued was the Decree on the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, while Congress established **Sovnarkom** to run the country.

### Decree for Land

Although, according to Marxist doctrine, land would be held communally (or rather, no one would own it but all would share it), peasants had already taken over privately owned land and divided it up. Lenin saw this as a *fait accompli* and rather than try to rule against it, he made the land seizures legal by decreeing that, in theory, there would be no private ownership of land and that it would be 'held in common' by the people who farmed it. In practice, this meant that land owned by landlords (people who rented out their land to small farmers) and the church would be taken away without compensation being paid for it. The land would then be divided among the peasants.

### Decree for Peace

Russia would pull out of the war and begin negotiations for peace with Germany. It was also stated that there would be no more secret diplomacy conducted.

### Decree on the Rights of the Peoples of Russia

This decree set up the structure for a federal state (in which different regions or republics would have their own independent rights over domestic policy) and it was followed by another decree in January 1918 that said any state wanting to leave (to secede from) the Soviet Union could do so.

While in Finland, where he had been hiding before the October Revolution, Lenin had written an important book, *The State and Revolution*. In this, he outlined his plans for a post-revolutionary Russia and indicated that he did not intend to share power with other parties. For Lenin, only one party knew how to proceed towards communism and it was up to the Bolsheviks to lead the way, to be the 'vanguard of the revolution'.

Lenin knew that elections for the Constituent Assembly had been promised by the Provisional Government and that the people expected these to take place, although he considered the Soviets to be more democratic than a parliament. Elections were held in November 1917, but the Bolsheviks did not gain enough seats to form a majority, and although Lenin allowed the Constituent Assembly to meet once in January 1918, he then closed it down. The Soviet Union did not turn into a single-party state overnight, but liberal parties were banned first and then, gradually, the more leftist parties were excluded from government until by 1921 all opposition was officially banned.

### SOURCE B

*...the closure of the Constituent Assembly, the suppression of other political parties, the elimination of press freedom and the establishment of party control over the soviets all occurred in the early years of Bolshevik rule. These moves effectively limited popular access to the political sphere ... and by 1920 had rendered any notion of unfettered competitive politics impossible.*

From Graeme Gill, *Stalinism*, 1998

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### QUESTIONS

- Find out what is meant by 'pluralism' in politics and discuss to what extent Lenin had decided by 1918 that this would not be put into practice in the Bolshevik state.
- How far, do you think, was this rejection of pluralism a reflection of how the Bolsheviks believed that they were the party to lead the people towards communism?

The **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** signed with Germany in March 1918 gave the people the peace for which they craved, but the price paid was very high and added to the discontent that was brewing among opponents of the Communist Party. Three years of brutal civil war followed and this led to radical policies being imposed in areas controlled by the Red Army. What now mattered most was that the revolution was secured and the **White and Green armies** were defeated. Meanwhile, the Tsar and his family were executed at Yekaterinburg in July 1918.

## Stalin after the Bolshevik Revolution

In 1917, Stalin, now a well-established member of the Communist Party leadership, was appointed Commissar for Nationalities. Unlike Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev, two other leading members of the party, Stalin had supported the decision to take power in October and, unlike Trotsky, had been a long-standing member of the Bolshevik Party.

It was as Commissar for Nationalities, however, that Stalin had his first quarrel with Lenin. Lenin believed that the republics of the former Russian Empire would support a communist revolution and could be trusted to bind themselves willingly to the Soviet Union. Stalin took a more pragmatic view, however, and wanted to ensure that all the republics were tightly bound to the centre and to the Bolshevik Party. In *The Soviet Century*, Moshe Lewin explains that Lenin wanted a federation of fairly autonomous states but Stalin, influenced by his own experience as a Georgian and also by his experiences during the civil war, was convinced that the republics had to be ruled from a strong centre and with strict discipline.

### SOURCE C

*In four years of Civil War, we were obliged to display liberalism towards the republics. As a result, we helped to form hard-line 'social-independentists' among them, who regard the Central Committee's decisions as simply being Moscow's. If we do not transform them into 'autonomies' immediately, the unity of the soviet republics is a lost cause. We are now busy bothering about how not to offend these nationalities. But if we carry on like this, in a year's time we'll be verging on the break-up of the party.*

Stalin quoted in Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 2005

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### QUESTIONS

- What did Stalin mean by suggesting the republics considered the Central Committee's decisions as 'simply being Moscow's'?
- What does this source tell you about how Stalin behaved as Commissar for Nationalities?



### Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a very harsh peace treaty with Germany in which Russia (the Soviet Union) lost 32 per cent of its arable land, 26 per cent of its railways, 33 per cent of its factories, 75 per cent of its iron and coal mines, and 62 million of its total population. (McCauley, *The Soviet Union 1917–1991*, 1993)

### White and Green armies

The White armies were composed of forces opposed to the Bolsheviks. These were not united in their aims and ranged from social revolutionaries to fervent monarchists who wanted the return of the Romanov dynasty. The Green armies were composed mostly of peasants and were especially active in the Ukraine. They were nationalistic and fought for regional independence. For the most part, the Greens would oppose both the Red and the White armies but, when required to choose a side, would more often side with the Reds, who had redistributed land to the peasants.



### The Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat

The Politburo was a group of seven officials elected from the Central Committee of the Communist Party. These officials decided on policies and so were extremely influential. The Politburo met regularly and was chaired by Lenin. After his death, it formed a 'collective leadership', although it was thought that Trotsky would probably succeed Lenin as its Chairman and leader. Both the Orgburo and the Secretariat dealt with the more practical but rather mundane aspects of the day-to-day running of the party, dealing with issues such as the election of representatives at a local level, the promotion of members within the party and so on. It is likely that the other leading Bolsheviks did not care for the rather humdrum work this involved. As the importance of the party grew, however, Stalin was now well-placed to ensure that he controlled its membership at all levels.

### Examiner's hint

Exam questions will sometimes ask you to analyze the rise to power of a single-party leader. If you are asked about Stalin or want to use him as an example, you could refer to events as far back as the October Revolution, if you want to. Or, you could begin with the death of Lenin in 1924, referring briefly to Stalin's appointments as Commissar for Nationalities and his promotion to General Secretary. Don't forget that you should focus on Stalin and not Lenin!

In 1922, the 'Georgian Question' brought this conflict to the surface. Georgia wanted to join the USSR as an independent republic and the Georgian Central Committee of the Communist Party complained they were limited in their autonomy and always overruled by the Transcaucasian Committee. According to Martin McCauley, Lenin had two irreconcilable aims because he wanted the republics to be independent but party organizations within them to be absolutely loyal to Moscow. Lenin suspected that Stalin wanted to restore centralized control that resembled Tsarist imperial ideology, and when the Treaty of the Union finally came into being in January 1924, Georgia did indeed enter as a member of the Transcaucasian Federation.

The Resolution on Party Unity, also known as 'the ban on factions', passed at the 10th Party Congress in 1921, tightened control over the party at all levels from the state down to the local branches. Stalin was to use this increasing control to good effect, as we shall see. In 1922, he was appointed General Secretary of the Party. He was now a member of the **Politburo**, the **Orgburo** and the **Secretariat**, the only leading member of the party to be in all three. This gave him a unique overview of the everyday running of the most powerful institutions in the Soviet Union.

## The death of Lenin and Stalin's rise to power

### The cast of characters:



Grigory Zinoviev



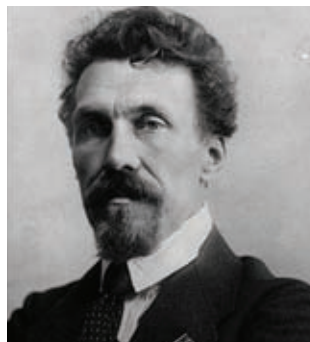
Lev Kamenev



Leon Trotsky



Nikolai Bukharin



Alexei Rykov



Mikhail Tomsky

**Grigory Zinoviev** – a Bolshevik since 1903 and a close comrade of Lenin. He was a member of the Politburo, the leader of the **Leningrad (Petrograd)** city and regional government and appointed the first Chairman of **Comintern** in 1919. Tried and executed in 1936.

**Lev Kamenev** – a Bolshevik since 1903 and a close confidant of Lenin. He was a member of the Politburo and chairman of the Moscow Party. Tried and executed in 1936.

**Leon Trotsky** – Bolshevik only since 1917, but a brilliant orator and strategist. Planned the revolution in October 1917 and led the Red Army to victory in the civil war. Commissar for Foreign Affairs and then appointed Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs. On Stalin's orders, Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico in 1940.

**Nikolai Bukharin** – a Bolshevik since 1906, he was the editor of *Pravda*. He was in the Politburo and also on the committee of Comintern. Tried and executed in 1938.

**Alexei Rykov** – a Bolshevik since 1903, Deputy Chairman of Sovnarkom, Chairman of **Gosplan**. He was a moderate who favoured Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP; see below). Tried and executed in 1938.

**Mikhail Tomskey** – a trade union leader who joined the Bolsheviks in 1906. A moderate who favoured the NEP, he was elected to the Politburo in 1927. In 1936, he openly criticized Stalin and then committed suicide.

These six staunch communists were to play a very important role in Stalin's rise to power.

## What methods did Stalin use to come to power?

Lenin's health had not been good since an assassination attempt on his life by Fanya Kaplan in August 1918. He never fully recovered and, in his early 50s, he suffered debilitating strokes in 1922 and 1923. Moshe Lewin considers Lenin's ill-health to have been crucial to Stalin's readiness to challenge him and suggests that without it Stalin would not have dared scheme against him too openly. As General Secretary of the Party, 'Stalin was charged by the Central Committee with supervising Lenin's medical treatment' and so was kept closely informed about Lenin's health (see Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 2005).

Lenin reversed his most controversial economic policy, **War Communism**, in 1921 and replaced it with the NEP. War Communism provoked a lot of opposition from the peasants, but also from the soldiers and sailors of the Kronstadt naval base (an important source of support for the Bolsheviks in 1917). The so-called Kronstadt Uprising in March 1921 was harshly suppressed, but it made Lenin realize that he needed to turn back to a more moderate economic policy, the NEP.

The NEP was what Lenin referred to as 'one step back', meaning that War Communism had not only failed to introduce a communist economy into the Soviet Union but had plunged the country into economic chaos. A less radical and more moderate solution had to be found and so a 'step back' into capitalism was taken. The NEP retained state control of what were called the 'commanding heights', meaning heavy industry, transportation and so on, but small businesses could be privately owned. Peasant farmers who had suffered greatly under the grain requisitioning policies of the civil war were now allowed to keep any surplus produce after they had paid taxes in kind (in goods). Later, they were allowed to pay tax in cash and so to keep or sell their goods as they wished.

This proved controversial, but Lenin succeeded in putting the new Soviet state on a more stable economic footing. Yet the switch to the NEP was so controversial that the Resolution on Party Unity was meant to halt further discussion and opposition. Within the Politburo, Trotsky had been vocally opposed to the NEP, believing that it led away from and not towards the development of a socialist state.

By 1923, it was apparent that the NEP suited the peasants, as agricultural production (severely hampered by the war and War Communism) had recovered. Industrial growth



### Leningrad etc

In 1914, St Petersburg had its name changed to a more Russian- (and less German-) sounding Petrograd. This remained the name until the death of Lenin in 1924 when, in his honour, it was re-named Leningrad. The name was changed back to St Petersburg in 1991, after the fall of the USSR.

### Comintern

Short for Communist International, an organization founded in Moscow in 1919 and dedicated to the global spread of communism.

### Gosplan (State Planning Commission)

Set up in February 1921 to coordinate and organize the Soviet economy. It was very important in gathering statistics and allocating resources for the Five Year Plans. It continued to function until 1991.

### War Communism

During the civil war, Lenin wanted to ensure that food grown in the countryside was delivered to the cities to feed the workers and to the army to feed the soldiers. In order to do this, he ordered the requisitioning of grain. In other words, peasants had to hand over the food they produced. Often, they were left with nothing, leading to widespread famine. Lenin extended this policy to introduce a system of barter to eliminate the need for cash. There was rationing, a ban on the private purchase and sale of goods, and major industries were nationalized. He thought these measures would serve two purposes, to win the war and also to proceed quickly towards a communist society.

### 10th Party Congress of 1921

At the 10th Party Congress that met in 1921, Lenin proposed the Resolution on Party Unity. This established that issues could be discussed at the level of the Central Committee, but once a decision had been made there could be no further discussion or disagreement. To pursue a different policy or to criticize party policy would be considered 'factionalism'. This method of imposing party unity is also referred to as 'democratic centralism'.



was much slower to recover, however, and there was a disparity between the cost of agricultural goods (cheap) and industrial goods (expensive). As a result, farmers produced less food. Trotsky viewed this as farmers (kulaks) holding the state to ransom, although Bukharin thought it was an economic trend that would resolve itself once industrial production speeded up and more goods led to cheaper prices. This event was referred to as the 'Scissors Crisis' because, on a graph, the decline in the cost of food and the increase in the cost of industrial goods intersected to look like an open pair of scissors. It deepened Trotsky's suspicion that the peasants were turning back to the old ways of producing food for profit.

Lenin's control of the Politburo weakened as his health deteriorated and he was less able to keep the Soviet Union on the course he had planned for it. In 1923, the leading Bolsheviks were divided over whether or not to support the NEP. Meanwhile, Lenin had lost the power of speech and could not maintain a united Politburo. When Lenin died in January 1924, it was the first time that the new Soviet state had to deal with the death of a leader and there was no ceremonial pattern to follow. There would be a state funeral, but it was also decided that Lenin would not be buried. His body was embalmed and displayed in a mausoleum, to become a place of pilgrimage for the Soviet people. Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, complained that he would not have wanted this, but her objections were brushed aside by Stalin, who set about turning Lenin into a god-like figure and himself into the closest and dearest disciple.

#### ● Examiner's hint

When you read about Stalin's rise to power, it is tempting to see it all as inevitable. Stalin, the plotter, manages Trotsky's downfall, his arrogant rival; astutely supports popular policies (NEP); moves almost seamlessly from the Right (with Bukharin) to the Left (against Bukharin); accuses enemies of 'factionalism'; fills the Politburo with supporters; and by 1929, is in sole charge of the Soviet Union. Could it all have been so easy? Beware of what is called '20/20 hindsight'! Sometimes we look back at events and everything seems to lead to one conclusion. Did Stalin plan it all so successfully? Luck probably played a part, but so did events over which he had no control, such as the War Scare of 1927 and popular unrest over the results of the NEP. To what extent did Stalin rise to power not only because of what he did, but also because of what happened in the Soviet Union? As you read through the following points, consider how Stalin both creates and takes advantage of opportunities to accumulate power.

## Method 1: Stalin and Lenin

Stalin had fallen out of favour by 1923, for his boorish behaviour towards Krupskaya had convinced Lenin that the General Secretary of the Party was 'too rude'. Ill-health, however, meant that Lenin was unable to do more than to express his reservations about Stalin (and others) in his Testament. This was a series of memorandums written by Lenin between 1922 and 1923. They reflected on the personalities in the leadership of the Communist Party and on likely successors. Lenin had realized that Stalin was too powerful and recommended that he be removed from his post as General Secretary. The Testament was to be read at the 12th Party Congress in 1924, but it was decided to spare Stalin's feelings and to keep it quiet. Also, there was a feeling that the leadership had to appear united after Lenin's death. (The Testament was mentioned by Nikita Khrushchev in his secret speech in 1956, but remained 'buried in the archives' until 1989.)

Lenin already had concerns about Stalin's Russian chauvinism in his role as Commissar for Nationalities, and was intending to act on these when he suffered a major stroke in March 1923. After this, Lenin was more or less incapable of directing the Politburo and Stalin became alert for opportunities to assert his influence. Much has been written about this period from 1923 to 1924, and it seems that Stalin was aware of how much was at stake and was able to take advantage of the power vacuum far more effectively than any of his rivals. Stalin gave the oration at Lenin's funeral, but also gave Trotsky the wrong date for the ceremony so that he missed the funeral altogether. Trotsky therefore committed the cardinal



sin of missing Lenin's funeral: he had been sunning himself in Sukhumi instead.

To expand the membership of the Party, Stalin began the 'Lenin Enrolment', which encouraged people to join as a mark of respect for the great leader. This policy also changed the nature of a party that had started as a deliberately small clique of leaders who would guide the masses. Now, the masses were being encouraged to join and to swell its ranks. From these masses would be chosen future members of the Central Committee and from his position as General Secretary, Stalin would oversee it all. Unlike the founding members who had argued with Lenin over interpretations of Marxism, the new membership could find a ready-made explanation of party policy in *The Foundations of Leninism* written by Stalin and published in 1924.

## Method 2: Stalin and the removal of his rivals

### Trotsky

Stalin and Trotsky had been considered likely successors to Lenin, although as we have seen by 1923 Stalin had fallen out of favour. Trotsky, with his legacy as the strategist of the October Revolution, his brilliant leadership of the Red Army during the civil war, and his considerable oratorical skills was best-placed to succeed Lenin in 1924. He lacked the will for a political fight, however, and was also unsure that, as a Jew, he would have the support necessary to lead the Soviet Union. Also, Trotsky failed to forge strong ties with his fellow members of the Politburo and made enemies by attacking the NEP and by advocating military-style leadership for the economy.

Neither Zinoviev nor Kamenev would support Trotsky in 1924 and both saw him as arrogant and overbearing. Along with Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev formed a *troika* (group of three) that planned to take over the leadership of the party once Trotsky had been removed. Trotsky lost support over his opposition to the NEP and his advocacy of 'permanent revolution', and he resigned as Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs in 1925. He remained in the Politburo, but was no longer considered a potential leader for the party.

### Zinoviev and Kamenev – the Left Opposition or the Left Deviationists

With Trotsky out of the way, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin came to the fore. In 1925 there was considerable debate over whether or not to continue with the NEP. Did it favour the peasants over the workers? Kamenev and Zinoviev (known as the 'Left Opposition') argued that it did and so should be discontinued. Perhaps it is not surprising that the two leaders whose support lay in the two major cities of Moscow and Leningrad should have sympathized with the workers rather than the peasants. They faced the opposition of Bukharin who, on the contrary, argued that the NEP worked effectively to develop the economy of the USSR and so should be continued. It was at the 14th Party Congress in 1925 that Kamenev attacked not only the NEP, but also Stalin's policy of 'Socialism in One Country'. The Central Committee was already filling with supporters of Stalin, however, and a vote was taken to remove Kamenev from the Politburo. This occurred when the membership of the Politburo increased to nine and Molotov, Kalinin and Voroshilov (all supporters of Stalin) were voted on. The *troika* was disbanded.

The Left Opposition became the United Opposition in 1926 when Kamenev and Zinoviev were joined by Trotsky. They were branded by Stalin as 'factionalists' (see the 10th Party Congress resolution in 1921) and expelled from the Central Committee and the Party. Trotsky was exiled to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan. Kamenev and Zinoviev, knowing when they were beaten, repented and were allowed back into the Party.



### Permanent revolution

Trotsky (and Lenin) had believed that the Russian Revolution would soon be followed by revolutions elsewhere. This would be good for Russia, as support would then be given by the more industrialized countries (e.g. Germany) to help modernize the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, within the Soviet Union harsh methods would have to be used to push it towards communism. Military discipline would be required to organize workers and peasants would be forced to accept collectivization.

### Socialism in One Country

By 1924, Stalin pointed out that the communist revolution had not succeeded elsewhere (by the end of the 1920s, Mongolia was the only other communist country) and it was unlikely to succeed in Germany or France, for instance, in the near future. The Soviet Union, therefore, had to depend upon its own resources and to focus on building socialism at home, an idea known as 'Socialism in One Country'. The methods Stalin would use to achieve this, however, were rather similar to the methods Trotsky proposed to achieve 'permanent revolution'.

### The War Scare

This was the name given to a period of tension following alleged interference by the USSR in the British General Strike of 1926 and the general election of 1927. The War Scare reflected a fear that the Soviet Union was surrounded by enemies. There were many apparent threats. Britain broke off diplomatic relations in 1927 after a police raid on the Soviet trade delegation in London. Jiang Jieshi (the leader of the Guomindang in China) had turned against his communist allies and was killing them in what was known as the White Terror. Voikov, the Soviet envoy to Warsaw, was assassinated. It was highly unlikely that war would have been launched against the Soviet Union, but this was less important for Stalin than the fear created by the prospect of war.

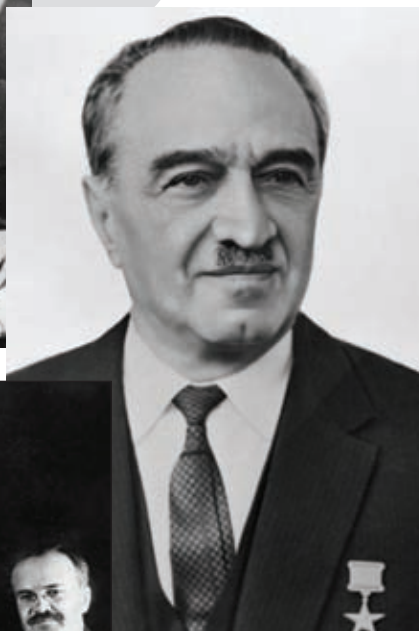
### Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy – the Right Opposition or the Right Deviationists

Stalin demonstrated a change of heart in 1927 when he began to criticize the NEP and to advocate a harsher policy towards the peasants. The **War Scare** had led to another spell of hoarding by the peasants and a subsequent rise in food prices. Stalin was not prepared to tolerate this and spoke of the need to industrialize and to bring agriculture under the control of the state. This belief was directly contrary to Bukharin's idea that the NEP worked effectively by giving peasants the incentive to produce more. By 1928, Stalin had started a policy of grain requisitioning. The days of the NEP were numbered. Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy were voted off the Politburo in 1929.

By 1929, Stalin had established his position as the most powerful member of the Politburo. He had undermined the authority of the Bolsheviks who had risen to power alongside him after the October Revolution. New members of the Politburo and close comrades of Stalin included Voroshilov, Mikoyan and Molotov. These three personalities were to remain alive (quite an achievement) and close to Stalin for the rest of his life.



Stalin and Voroshilov.



Anastas Mikoyan.



Molotov and Stalin.

### SOURCE D

*Stalin was the most violent of leading Bolsheviks. His terror campaigns in the civil war were gruesome. He adopted a military style tunic and knee-length black boots, and his soup-strainer moustache indicated a pugnacious man. At tactics and conspiracy he was masterful. He had reached dominance in the party before Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin knew what had happened. There was no keeping a bad man down in the politics of the USSR.*

From Robert Service, *Comrades*, 2007

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### ACTIVITY

Look at the list below and write a few lines on each of these headings to make sure you understand what each of them means. Sort the list into two columns, one under the heading 'Conditions' and the other under the heading 'Methods'.

- Lenin's early death
- Lenin's Testament is kept secret
- Disagreements over the NEP
- The Lenin Enrolment
- The Foundations of Leninism
- Lenin doesn't seem to have a clear successor
- Trotsky seems easily outwitted by Stalin
- Permanent Revolution vs Socialism in One State
- Changing membership of the Politburo
- The War Scare of 1927
- The Scissors Crisis

You may find it rather difficult to decide where to place some of these bullet points. How, for instance, do you choose where to put the War Scare of 1927? Was this a 'method' thought up and used by Stalin or a 'condition' that he used to his advantage?

### QUESTION

For what reasons and by what methods was Stalin able to rise to power as the leader of the Soviet Union by 1929?

### ESSAY INTRODUCTIONS

As we saw in previous chapters, the introduction to your essay is important. You need to show that you understand what the question is asking and to indicate how you will answer it. It is a good idea to refer to the question in your introduction.

Here are some samples of introductions for the essay question above.

#### Student Answer A – Patrick

Josef Dzhugashvili (named Stalin), was born in Georgia in 1879, he was the son of a shoemaker and the grandson of serfs. He soon became Marxist and in 1904 he joined the Bolshevik Party. He climbed up the ladder of the party and in 1917 he was the editor of *Pravda*. He became Commissar for Nationalities and was one of the main artisans of the creation of the USSR. He was also General Secretary of the Party's Central Committee since 1922, (a position considered as boring bureaucratic work by the other Revolutionaries) and a member of the Politburo. Before 1924, he was not a public figure but his internal influence was important.

#### Examiner's comments

This introduction is rather short and has too much narrative content. It does mention Stalin and gives some context to his emergence as leader, but it makes no mention of the essay question. It is a good idea to refer to the question in your opening paragraph. In this way, you will show the examiner that you are focused and that you will be answering the question. It also reminds you not to be too narrative in your approach.

#### ● Examiner's hint

When you consider how single-party leaders rise to power there are several factors to bear in mind, including:

What conditions exist that allow leaders to centralize power? (In other words, are there opportunities that can be taken to enable leaders to seize power?)

What kind of methods do they use to get their hands on power?

**Student Answer B – Clara**

Lenin was for sure the strong commander of Russia till 1922, when he suffered his first stroke. After that, his leadership began to weaken, until his death on the 12th of January 1924. Before he died, though, it was clear to him that there would almost certainly be a struggle for power after he was gone. For this reason he wrote his Testament, in which he gave short portraits of his most probable successors, and their faults. He recognized five possible candidates: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Josef Stalin. Of these, it was Stalin who climbed to the top and became the main leader by 1929. Lenin had warned that although Stalin had great practical abilities, these were offset by his roughness and lack of consideration for his colleagues. Stalin, Lenin said, was 'too rude' and should be removed from his post as General Secretary of the Communist Party. Not only did Stalin manage to keep this quiet, he also managed to outmanoeuvre the other likely candidates for leader. How far, however, was his rise to the top a result of external reasons that Stalin was able to exploit or of Stalin's own political skills? This essay will examine both the reasons for and the methods by which Stalin came to power.

**Examiner's comments**

Clara's introduction is quite a lot better than Patrick's. She begins with a reference to Lenin and gives some relevant background before moving on to mention the essay question. This introduction makes a good impression by indicating that Clara will select relevant material and focus on Stalin's rise to power. Furthermore, she will address both 'reasons for' and 'methods' and so answer both parts of the question.

**How you end your essay is also important! A good conclusion should sum up your arguments and, again, focus on answering the question.**

**Student Answer C – Joanna**

Stalin's rise to power is mainly due to his political skills, his pragmatism, his populism, and his patience. Those skills were based on a strong propaganda, especially on the 'Cult of Lenin'. Propaganda leads the new uneducated base of the party to Stalin's cause, marginalizing his opponents. Stalin also benefited from the many errors of his opponent, particularly about Lenin's Testament. Stalin's rise to power left him in a position of entire control. He would soon become a strong totalitarian leader.

**Examiner's comments**

This is a rather short conclusion, but it does summarize the main points. It also refers to the question. It would be a good idea to say a little more about Lenin's Testament, however, as it needs to be made clear here why it was so important (was it more important than the use of 'factions', for instance?). Also, mentioning 'totalitarian' in the last sentence introduces an entirely new concept, perhaps not such a good idea.

**Student Answer D – Chris**

There is a great deal of controversy regarding how Stalin rose to power as many factors will have influenced events. On the one hand, as has already been mentioned, in many ways Stalin was lucky, benefiting from factors such as the premature death of Lenin to his rivals' weaknesses. In addition to this, Stalin benefited from circumstances such as the economic situation in the Soviet Union as well as the failure of revolution abroad. However, Stalin's triumph was not due just to good fortune and accidental circumstances. Indeed, it is not to be forgotten that Stalin's emergence as the single leader of the Soviet Union would not have been possible without his own ruthless political ability and his skill to take advantage of all the previously mentioned circumstances. As Bukharin once said, Stalin was 'an unprincipled intriguer who changed his theories at will in order to get rid of whomever he wished'.



### Examiner's comments

This is a much better conclusion. It mentions both methods and conditions and adds another factor, which is Stalin's political skill. It also ends nicely with an appropriate quotation.

## Other aspects of Stalin's rise to power

### Were his methods legal or illegal?

In some cases, single-party leaders use a combination of legal and illegal methods to come to power. For Stalin, what he did was entirely legal. He was an elected member of the Politburo, he was appointed to be General Secretary of the Communist Party and to the Orgburo. He had considerable power available to him because he held high office. When he accused his rivals of 'factionalism' he was applying a resolution that Lenin had proposed and that had been accepted by the 10th Congress of the Supreme Soviet in 1921. When his rivals were expelled from the Politburo, they were removed because the majority of the members voted for this. So, you could argue that Stalin's actions were quite legal.

### Did he also respond to popular opinion?

Historians consider Stalin's ability to gauge public opinion and 'to give the people what they want' to be one of the important methods he used to establish himself in power. (Of course, clever use of propaganda can also be used to tell people what they want, and Stalin was able to use this very effectively)

Since 1917, workers had looked for greater participation in the running of factories and an improved standard of living. The civil war had brought more hardship and to many the NEP was a betrayal of the revolution when it re-introduced the right to own small businesses and to hire labour. The prevalence of 'Nepmen' further angered workers, who saw these entrepreneurs or 'middle men' as exploiters of the working class. Stalin ceased to support the NEP once he had got rid of the Left Deviationists and, in doing so, he would also echo the grievances of the workers. The arguments raged inside the Central Committee (Zinoviev and Trotsky had both been expelled from the Politburo by now) and ended with Trotsky's expulsion to Alma-Ata and Zinoviev and Kamenev asking forgiveness.

## Section II:

## Stalin in power: Domestic policies and their impact

### Stalin's domestic policies

#### The Five Year Plans: 'The turn to the left'

In 1927, after several years of supporting the NEP, Stalin worked on an alternative economic system. This was the Five Year Plan, a model of economic planning that would eventually be adopted in almost every communist country during the 20th century. (See below p.114 for detailed outlines of each plan.)

A measure of central planning had been put in place by Lenin, and Gosplan was set up in 1921 to control the 'commanding heights' of industry that were to be nationalized under



To access Worksheet 4.1 on Stalin's rise to power, please visit [www.pearsonbacconline.com](http://www.pearsonbacconline.com) and follow the on-screen instructions.

### Vesenkha (Supreme Council of the National Economy)

Set up in December 1917 to control the newly nationalized industries. It existed until 1932, when it was reorganized into different departments.

the NEP. Another organization that supervised nationalized industry was **Vesenkha**, set up in 1917.

Stalin believed that only through strict centralized control would the Soviet Union be able to achieve the level of production it needed to industrialize and urbanize. Since 1855, Russia had been attempting to achieve these twin aims, but with only limited success. Stalin was determined to succeed, however, where the Tsars had failed.

The Soviet economy was based on agriculture and it was agricultural exports that underpinned the economy. In order to industrialize, new technology needed to be imported from abroad, and to purchase this agricultural exports had to be increased. In other words, the Five Year Plan would be financed by agriculture, and the peasants, always unreliable in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, would have to work in the interests of the state. To achieve this, farms would have to be collectivized.

## The collectivization of agriculture

The peasants were a force to be reckoned with, as they constituted more than 80 per cent of the population of the Soviet Union, but they were also a force to be crushed and bent to the will of the state. Bukharin had maintained that financial incentives would encourage peasants to increase production, but Stalin did not want to do this. He wanted to be sure that land and food production was under the full control of the state. Collectivization was also considered to be an important way to instil 'communalism' (people living and working together) and also to provide a workforce for the industrial cities.

In 1929, *kolkhozi* or collective farms were established to replace the individual farms owned by the peasants. Those who disagreed with or refused to go along with the orders of the party cadres were branded 'kulaks' and were severely punished. Norman Lowe states, 'It was probably in September, 1929 that Stalin was converted to total collectivisation' (*Mastering Twentieth Century Russian History*, 2002). Approximately 25 million small peasant farms were consolidated into 200,000 *kolkhozi* and hundreds of thousands of peasants became paid labourers on *sovkhozi* (state farms). By 1936, 90 per cent of all peasant households in the Soviet Union had been collectivized.

For Stalin, there were several advantages to collectivization:

- The USSR had an agrarian economy as most of its people lived in the countryside and worked the land, so collectivization gave state control to the main source of national wealth.
- Agriculture would 'pay tribute' to industry and cheap food could feed the cities and also be exported to finance the purchase of machinery from abroad.
- The authority of the Communist Party would be extended over the countryside and peasants would no longer be able to hold the state to ransom. Machine Tractor Stations were set up for a group of *kolkhozi*. Tractors and other machinery could be hired from these stations. Party officials were also based in the stations so they could check that party policies were carried out at a local level.
- Food production would be made more efficient and it would be easier to use machinery such as tractors on larger farms.
- Not all the peasants needed to or wanted to stay in a collectivized countryside and the 'surplus labour' would be encouraged to leave and look for work in the cities.
- Collectivization would ensure state control over the production of food, which would be centrally planned like the rest of the economy.

Collectivization was not a popular policy and, in 1930, the shockingly poor harvest resulted in Stalin calling a temporary halt with his '**Dizzy with Success**' article in *Pravda*.

### Dizzy with Success

This is a reference to an article by Stalin published in *Pravda* in March 1930 that suggested collectivization had been pushed ahead too quickly by party officials who were 'dizzy with success'. The pace needed to be slowed down and so houses, small plots and animals would no longer be collectivized. Peasants left the collective farms at an alarming rate and planted the spring wheat. Once this had taken place, Stalin resumed collectivization.



He also arranged for a small army of party activists known as the ‘25,000ers’ to go to the countryside to encourage the peasants to follow party directives.

In the end, Stalin just wore opponents down and the disastrous famine in 1932–33 killed as many as 5–8 million people, particularly in the Ukraine. Although many historians would argue that the famine in the Ukraine was ‘genocidal’, Robert Service challenges this allegation by pointing out that the requisitioning quotas were cut three times during 1932 in response to evidence of widespread starvation. He also maintains that Stalin needed Ukrainian labour as much as he needed labour from elsewhere and that a deliberate policy of starvation would not have made economic sense (*A History of Modern Russia*, 2005). Grain requisitioning was, nevertheless, a brutal policy carried out regardless of the human cost.

### SOURCE A

*Collectivization was the great turning-point in Soviet history. It destroyed a way of life that had developed over many centuries – a life based on the family farm, the ancient peasant commune, the independent village and its church and the rural market, all of which were seen by the Bolsheviks as obstacles to socialist industrialisation. Millions of people were uprooted from their homes and dispersed across the Soviet Union... This nomadic population became the main labour force of Stalin’s industrial revolution, filling the cities and the industrial building sites, the labour camps and ‘special settlements’ of the Gulag.*

*The First Five Year Plan, which set this pattern of forced development, launched a new type of social revolution (a ‘revolution from above’) that consolidated the Stalinist regime: old ties and loyalties were broken down, morality dissolved and new (‘Soviet’) values and identities imposed, as the whole population was subordinated to the state and forced to depend on it for almost everything – housing, schooling, jobs and food – controlled by the planned economy.*

From Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers*, 2007

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

What does Source A tell you about the impact that Stalin’s policies had upon society in the Soviet Union?

### SOURCE B

Table of statistics for grain production and procurement 1929–34 (millions of metric tons)

	Grain Production	Grain Procurement	Procurement as a % of production
1929	66.8	10.8	(16.2%)
1930	71.0	16.0	(22.5%)
1931	65.0	22.1	(34.0%)
1932	65.0	23.7	(36.5%)
1933	71.0	23.3	(32.8%)
1934	77.5	28.4	(36.6%)

Source: Martin McCauley, *The Soviet Union 1917–1991*, 1993

**SOURCE C****Table of statistics for grain production (millions of metric tons) and grain export 1929–33**

	Grain Production	Grain Export %
1929	71.7	0.18
1930	83.5	4.76
1931	69.5	5.06
1932	69.6	1.73
1933	68.4	1.69

Source: Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, 1969, quoted in Norman Lowe, *Mastering Twentieth Century Russian History*, 2002

**SOURCE D****Table of statistics for numbers of farm animals 1929–34 (million head)**

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Cattle	67.1	52.3	47.9	40.1	38.4	42.4
Pigs	20.4	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1	17.4
Sheep and Goats	147.0	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2	51.9

Source: Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, 1969, quoted in Chris Corin and Terry Fiehn, *Communist Russia under Lenin and Stalin*, 2002

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION****QUESTIONS**

Study the tables of statistics and answer the following questions

- What do these tables tell you about the rate at which the state procured grain from the peasants?
- Is there a decrease in the level of procurement? Why did this take place, do you think?
- What happens to the numbers of farm animals? Why does this happen?
- If you look at the statistics for the levels of grain production in the two tables, you will see they are different. Why, do you think, is this so?

**Peasants to proletariat****SOURCE E**

For every thirty peasants who entered the kolkhozi, ten would leave the countryside altogether, mostly to become wage labourers in industry. By the early months of 1932, there were several million people on the move, crowding railway stations, desperately trying to escape the famine areas. The cities could not cope with this human flood. Diseases spread and pressure grew on housing, on food and on fuel supplies, which encouraged people to move from town to town in search of better conditions. Frightened that its industrial strongholds would be overrun by famine-stricken and rebellious peasants, the Politburo introduced a system of internal passports to limit the immigration to the towns.

From Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers*, 2007



Orlando Figes goes on to describe how the internal passports were also used to get rid of 'socially dangerous elements' that might rise up against the government. He also states that for many of the dispossessed, having no passport made them move often, seeking work illegally. In this mass movement, children were often abandoned. They were also abandoned by parents exiled to gulags who wanted to spare their children the same fate and, during the famine, by parents who could not feed them. 'They roamed the streets, rummaging through rubbish for unwanted food. They scraped a living from begging, petty theft and prostitution'.

Figes states that police figures showed that between 1934 and 1935, more than 840,000 homeless children were brought to the 'reception centres' and then sent to orphanages or the camps. In December 1934, Stalin passed a law stating that children over 12 could be treated as criminals and subject to the same punishments as adults, including execution. Figes states that between 1935 and 1940, more than 100,000 children between 12 and 16 were convicted of criminal offences.

The dark side of the Soviet Union during the 1930s is very bleak indeed, and both Figes and the British novelist Martin Amis, in his book *Koba the Dread*, describe the brutality of a system that was determined to forge a new utopia. Stalin (it is claimed) said that 'to make an omelette, you must break eggs', that 'if a man is a problem, no man, no problem'. His callousness is demonstrated over and over again, as well as that of his henchmen, who arrested, tortured, imprisoned and executed victims. These victims were often innocent people plucked at random for having the wrong name; being in the wrong place; having a powerful enemy. This 'randomness' was terrifying and meant that no one was safe.

## The First, Second and Third Five Year Plans

The Five Year Plans were Stalin's answer to the problems created by the NEP. Only by taking full state control of the resources and the labour of the Soviet Union would industrialization be achieved. For Stalin, this policy would result not only economic growth and economic self-sufficiency, but also an increase in state control (party control) over the USSR and the creation of a disciplined proletariat. The theory of Marxism would be put into practice not from the bottom up but from the top down, which is why it is sometimes called the 'revolution from above' or 'the second revolution'. The Bolshevik Revolution had occurred in 1917, but now the conditions for a Marxist state would be put in place.

### The First Five Year Plan (1928/29–32)

The First Five Year Plan was officially adopted in 1929, although it had unofficially begun in late 1928. It called for a massive increase in industrial output; this was highly ambitious for a country that did not have a workforce with the necessary skills. Stalin now set out to create a proletariat by moving large numbers of peasants from the countryside to the cities, or perhaps more accurately in some cases, to areas where cities would be built.

The aim of this plan was to 'increase the production of the means of production', in other words: to build iron and steel manufacturing plants; to build electric power stations; to build the infrastructure including railways; and to increase the production of coal and oil. This expansion would be the basis of the push for industrialization.

Listed here are some of the problems that Stalin faced with the Five Year Plan, along with the solutions that he came up with.



#### ToK Time

Slavoj Žižek, a Slovene philosopher, argues that the Soviet Union was different from the German Third Reich because in the Nazi regime the enemies of the state were clearly identified as communists or Jews. In this way, there was a horrible rationale to the death camps, whereas in the Soviet Union, no-one knew who would be executed or sent to the gulags.

Those who say that Nazism was worse would argue that at least communism had a utopian vision to fulfil, one that intended to establish a more egalitarian society. Is this an acceptable argument, do you think? If a leader is responsible for the deaths of thousands or even millions of people, can this be justified if it is for the good of the majority?

Problem	Solution
To access the necessary skills	Encourage skilled technicians and engineers to come from abroad on fixed-term contracts
To import the necessary technology	Pay for it by accumulating foreign exchange from the sale of grain
To persuade peasants to adapt to the discipline necessary for working in a factory, for example, getting to work on time	Introduce harsh labour laws to punish offenders
To prevent workers from leaving jobs they found too demanding and looking for work elsewhere	Introduce internal passports that prevented workers from changing jobs
To explain why the targets set by the Five Year Plans were not achieved	Change the statistics or blame the 'foreign experts'

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Read through the 'problems and solutions' listed above. See what you can find out about when some of these measures were introduced.

## The Second 1932–37 and Third Five Year Plan (1937–)

The focus in these two Five Year Plans shifted to the production of heavy industrial goods. The iron and steel plants were producing iron and steel, the electric power stations were providing electricity, but the country needed trains, trucks and tractors. Reflect for a moment on the European context of this period, when Hitler was focusing on the re-armament of Germany and many Central and Eastern European countries had right-wing authoritarian governments that were opposed to communism and the Soviet Union. For this reason, Stalin wanted to make sure that the Soviet Union would have the resources to re-arm, and so this emphasis became an important aspect of both the Second and Third Five Year Plans. (Note that the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 interrupted the Third Five Year Plan).

### SOURCE F

#### Industrial production during the First and Second Five Year Plans

	1928	1932	1933	1936
Electric power (billion kWh)	5.0	13.5	16.4	32.8
Coal (million tons)	35.5	64.4	76.3	126.8
Pig iron (million tons)	3.3	6.2	7.1	14.4
Rolled steel (million tons)	3.4	4.4	5.1	12.5
Quality steel (million tons)	0.09	0.68	0.89	2.06
Cement (million tons)	1.85	3.48	2.71	5.87
Locomotives (standard units)	478	828	941	1566
Tractors (thousand 15hp units)	1.8	50.8	79.9	173.2
Lorries (thousands)	0.7	23.7	39.1	131.5
Woollen fabrics (million linear metres)	101	89	86	102

Source: R.W. Davies, M. Harrison and S.G. Wheatcroft (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union 1913–1945*, 1994, quoted in Chris Corin and Terry Fiehn, *Communist Russia Under Lenin and Stalin*, 2002

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### QUESTIONS

- a) Why does the rate of growth in the production of goods increase quite slowly at first but quite significantly by 1936?
- b) Why was the number of tractors produced so significant?
- c) Look at what is listed in this table. Why are these goods so important to the Soviet Union during the 1930s? What kind of progress do they indicate?
- d) What happens to the production of woollen fabric? What would this be used for? What does it suggest about what is not given importance in the Five Year Plans?

### ● Examiner's hint

If you write an essay answer to a question that asks about the success or failure of Stalin's economic policy, it is a good idea to include some statistical evidence. You do not need to use all the statistics in the table above, for instance, but if you could show that the production of coal increases or the output of electricity goes up, this can help support your argument.

## How did Stalin carry out the Five Year Plans?

### Labour discipline

Many of the workers that came to the cities were peasants whose work routine varied in accordance with daylight hours and the seasons. Now, they needed to adjust to the demands of factory life and so had to arrive at work on time and stay until their shift was over. There were very harsh laws introduced that punished workers who were late or absent and that also made it a crime to break machinery or to take anything from the workplace. In the most extreme cases, these crimes were punished with execution. Early on during the First Five Year Plan, workers would move from one factory to the next looking for better conditions, but this practice was also forbidden. Workers had to have workbooks as a form of internal passport, and losing a job also meant losing your right to accommodation and food rations.

Managers were held responsible for meeting targets given to them by the state. If they failed to do so, they could be charged with 'sabotage' and accused of deliberately preventing the fulfilment of the Five Year Plan. This was a crime that could be punished with a death sentence. Both worker and manager sabotage quickly became an official excuse that could be used to explain the failure to meet the very ambitious targets set by the state.

### Slave labour

It was during the 1930s that so many of the gulags were built. These were the labour camps where the kulaks were sent and also where hundreds of thousands of political prisoners were sent during the 'purges' (see Section III below, p.122). Conditions were so harsh that the majority of prisoners would die, often in their first year of captivity. The gulags were located in the most inhospitable areas of the Soviet Union, where winter temperatures fell as low as -50 degrees centigrade. They were remote from areas of habitation, and so difficult to escape from, and they were also located in areas rich in resources such as gold, uranium and coal. Free citizens would not have wanted to go and work in such places, but prisoners had no choice. When the growth of the Soviet economy during the Five Year Plans is measured, the contribution of the gulag prisoners has to be included as part of the terrible human cost.

### Enthusiasm

There was clear enthusiasm among the workforce for many of Stalin's ambitious policies, although Robert Service maintains that the enthusiasts were in a minority. Even so, many

**ToK Time**

If you were asked to work hard or to put up with difficult circumstances so that conditions could be better for future generations, how, do you think, would you react? Would you do so willingly?

Consider the question of climate change, when we are asked to reduce energy consumption or even to become vegetarians so that we can secure the future of the planet at a time when we may not even be alive. What arguments can you think of to support and also to reject such a proposal?

**Stakhanovites**

Alexei Stakhanov was a coal miner who mined 106 tons of coal or 14 times his quota during a single shift in 1935. A movement was named after him to encourage all workers in the Soviet Union to work harder. It was very popular, with many workers attracted by the rewards such as extra rations, medals or even a motorcycle.

people believed in the importance of what they were achieving and were ready to tolerate extremely difficult conditions as they built, for instance, the city of Magnitogorsk. Here conditions were hardly better than in the gulags. Machinery was scarce but tremendous feats were achieved with man (and woman) power alone. Enthusiasts maintained that they were working for the country's future. This was not the 'alienated' labour that Marx had written about, but was the labour of people building a new world for themselves and for future generations.

## Rewards

Workers were given different rewards or incentives for their efforts:

- Posters and party directives extolled the virtues of **Stakhanovites** and many were encouraged to try to emulate his success. They could receive food that was in short supply or even a motorbike for doubling or tripling their work quotas.
- League tables were published in all the factories, publicizing what each worker had produced in a week.
- Wages differentiated between skilled and unskilled workers.
- A good work record and party membership could lead to promotion for workers who had little formal education.

## Propaganda

Stalin's speeches about the successes of the Five Year Plans were printed in *Pravda*. Yet the workers who actually built huge factories and electric power plants could see with their own eyes that the Soviet Union was industrializing and, indeed, catching up with the capitalist powers. Workers were told that the conditions in the capitalist countries were dire, and as this was the era of the Great Depression, newspapers carried photographs and articles about the food lines in New York and the hunger marches in London. What Stalin did not tell Soviet citizens, of course, was that in the Soviet Union prison camps were overflowing with people put there for no reason other than their names had been added to a list. Like everything else, there were targets to be achieved for political prisoners.

For ideological indoctrination, Stalin's *Short Course on the History of the Communist Party of the USSR* was published in 1938 and, like the *Foundations of Leninism*, served as an introduction to the 'new' history of the Bolshevik Revolution.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTION

#### How successful were Stalin's domestic policies?

In an essay asking you to assess the success of Stalin's domestic policies, you would need to refer to the Five Year Plans. How would statistics help you to support arguments for their success?

To help you put these statistics in perspective, consider the levels of economic growth – for comparison, check the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the USA or China or Russia between 1929 and 1937.

Don't forget that when you are asked a question like this in the exam, you must first consider what the aims were. When you think about the success of a policy, you need to ask yourself what the single-party leader intended. Then, you can look at the evidence and decide whether or not he achieved his goals. It is also worth looking more 'holistically' at the notion of 'success'. Was the policy successful for the citizens of the country concerned? Was the human cost of 'success' too much to bear?



In the case of Stalin's domestic policies, you would need to think about the following:

What did Stalin want to achieve when he devised the Five Year Plans? Use the following sub-headings to organize your evidence.

- His economic aims
- His social aims
- His political aims.

Was he able to achieve these aims?

Were his policies successful for the people of the Soviet Union?:

- In the countryside
- In the city
- For the workers
- For the managers
- For the party members.

What was the cost? Was it worth it?



To access Worksheet 4.2 on the Soviet Union's industrialization under Stalin, please visit [www.pearsonbacconline.com](http://www.pearsonbacconline.com) and follow the on-screen instructions.

## Stalin's social policies

### The role of women

The role of women had changed after the revolution, with opportunities opening up for careers as engineers and doctors, professions traditionally seen as the privilege of men. It is worth noting, however, that the upper echelons of the Communist Party did not have many women in its ranks and none appeared in the Politburo. By 1930, furthermore, Stalin wanted to restore more conservative values and this shift backwards became known as 'The Great Retreat'. The family once again became the central unit of society. The freedom afforded by revolution had to be reined in, as easy divorce had led to the abandonment of children and the ease of abortion threatened to halt population growth (although other reasons for this included poor nutrition, shortage of accommodation and exhaustion from hard work). To encourage population growth, abortion was made illegal in 1936, divorce was discouraged and women were rewarded with medals for giving birth to ten or more children. Moshe Lewin notes that, officially, there was a slight improvement in the birth rate in 1937, but that it fell again in 1939.

As well as being mothers and homemakers, women also had to play their part in the expansion of the Russian economy. On the collective farms, women were expected to work in the fields. This role was especially important during World War II, when men were drafted into the Red Army and many did not return from the war. In factories, women were expected to do the work of men and to take part in construction brigades, which helped to rebuild wartorn cities after 1945. Women were trained as pilots during the war and, unlike their counterparts in the USA and in Britain, they saw combat duties.

This poster shows women on a collective farm. The woman in the foreground is gathering corn and the women behind her are also working. Notice that the supervisors, however, are men.



Russian women fighter pilots of World War II. Women had been trained as engineers and technicians during the 1930s and it is not surprising that they were expected to be on active duty. Of course, the majority stayed at home to be an even more vital part of the workforce in factories and on collective farms.



## Religion

The Russian Orthodox Church had for centuries been a strongly nationalistic mainstay of Russian society. Under Lenin, it was frowned upon to attend church and the demonization of religion was an important aspect of collectivization among the peasants, for whom religious belief was still very important. Churches were destroyed, bells hauled away to be melted down, priests were driven out along with the kulaks. Geoffrey Hosking argues, however, that centuries of religious worship could hardly be eradicated so easily and that in many cases, people formed ‘underground’ churches, meeting secretly (*History of the Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, 1992). Similarly, in the areas where Islam was the dominant religion, most mosques closed and imams suffered the same fate as priests. Such practices as the veiling of women; fasting during Ramadan; polygamy and travelling to Mecca on the *haj* were all forbidden. As in Christian communities, however, official prohibitions did not drive out religious belief but, rather, drove it underground.

When World War II broke out, Stalin changed his approach to the Church and used it to gather support from the people for the war effort. Religion was linked to nationalism and support for the defeat of the German invaders.

## Art and culture

- Stephen Lee suggests in *Stalin and the Soviet Union* that music in the USSR underwent something of a renaissance during the 1930s. The compositions of Prokofiev and Shostakovich, in particular, gained critical acclaim and would surely be considered among the finest music of the 20th century. No other dictatorship saw such a quantity of fine music. Stalin did not understand music but, clearly, he did not fear it either, although in the post-war period his taste grew more conservative and even Prokofiev and Shostakovich fell out of favour.

As summed up by Robert Service, ‘Above all, the arts had to be optimistic’ (*A History of Modern Russia*, 2003) and the school of Soviet Realism produced paintings that resembled propaganda posters intended both to entertain and educate the masses. Meanwhile, the writer Maxim Gorky returned to the Soviet Union in 1928, was feted by Stalin and provided with a large house in which to live. He was instrumental in establishing, in 1934, the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers to ‘unite all writers supporting the platform of Soviet power and aspiring to participate in the building of socialism’ (Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union, 1917–1991*, 1992). In other words, the aim was to capture ‘Soviet realism’ in literature. Hosking explains how such novels revolved around a hero ‘who appears from

among the people, he is guided and matured by the party ... and then leads his comrades and followers to great victories over enemies and natural obstacles in the name of the wonderful future that the party is building' (*History of the Soviet Union 1917–1991*, 1992). *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1934), an autobiographical novel by Nikolai Alexeevich Ostrovsky, was from this genre and glorified the workers of the new Soviet Union. Another famous novel was written by Mikhail Sholokhov, *Quiet Flows the Don*. It focused on the heroic years of the revolution and civil war and gained an international reputation, with its author being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1965.

Writers who found favour with the regime were well looked after and led lives of privilege. Not all writers chose to follow the guidelines laid down, however, and Isaac Babel, Oscar Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak chose what Babel called 'the genre of silence'.

**Sergei Eisenstein**, the famous film-maker, produced epics such as *Ivan the Terrible*, recalling Russia's great leaders. The sequel to this film, however, was interpreted as being critical of Stalin and Eisenstein was criticized and dismissed from his post as the head of the Moscow Film School.

### **Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948)**

Best known for his film of the mutiny on the battleship *Potemkin* and for *October*, his account of the 1917 revolution, Eisenstein was one of the leading film-makers in the Soviet Union. He experienced mixed fortunes under Stalin, but was praised both for *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible – Part One* (1943), both of which were strongly nationalistic. *Ivan the Terrible – Part Two* (1946), however, depicted the Tsar as a ruthless tyrant, and Eisenstein was strongly criticized. The film was banned and scenes that had been filmed for *Ivan the Terrible – Part Three* were destroyed.



#### **ToK Time**

Here are examples of the kind of art that was encouraged and discouraged under Stalin's rule. On the left we have an example of Soviet Realism and on the right, an example of the work of Kazimir Malevich.

Why, do you think, did Stalin prefer Soviet Realism? Which painting would be critically acclaimed today? Justify your answers.



## Education and social mobility

One of the dilemmas that faced the revolutionaries in their efforts to transform the Soviet Union into a socialist state was how to address education. The children of the better-educated were more likely to go on to higher education, but appeared to perpetuate an elitist system. The difficulty lay in getting more people from poorer backgrounds into education. Under Lenin there was an attempt to make education more accessible, although the actual curriculum in schools did not change much. In 1928, it was pronounced that 65 per cent of those entering higher technical education had to be of working-class origin, a figure raised to 70 per cent in 1929, when 14 per cent of students had to be women. The

percentage of working-class students in higher education went up from 30 per cent in 1928–29 to 58 per cent in 1932–33, and an effort was made to get rid of non-party lecturers and professors.

Already by 1931, the Central Committee was determined that students needed to be literate and have an understanding of basic science. By the mid 1930s, there were officially prescribed textbooks; tests and exams were restored; the teaching of history had to focus on political events and great men; uniforms were compulsory (including pigtails for girls); and fees were imposed for the three upper forms of secondary school.

But education was not just about book work and class learning. Back in the late 1920s, reforms took place to introduce closer links between education and practical work experience. As Hosking explains, ‘The upper forms of middle schools were reclassified as *tekhnikuny*, or vocational training colleges, and by the end of 1930 all schools were required to attach themselves to an enterprise... The proportion of political instruction was also increased’ (*History of the Soviet Union 1917–1991*, 1992). Hosking mentions some of the side-effects of these reforms, with children as young as 11 working in coal mines or picking cotton for weeks on end. In other cases, factory managers found the attendance of children to be disruptive and tried to avoid having them present. Undoubtedly, the dismissal of schoolteachers who were not party members or who had, in most cases, simply been educated before the revolution, opened up opportunities for social mobility as younger ‘red specialists’ were given teaching posts. The party also realized it needed future leaders and selected these from factories, mines and state farms to study at technical institutes. ‘According to Sheila Fitzpatrick, during the first Five Year Plan, some 110,000 Communist adult workers and some 40,000 non-party ones entered higher educational institutions in this way’ (Hosking). The quota system imposed in 1929 was abolished in 1935. This change was probably due to questionable results as ‘probably 70 per cent failed to complete their course’ (McCauley, *The Soviet Union 1917–1991*, 1993).

Urbanization and more access to education often did lead to more social mobility as, for many people, opportunities they could hardly have imagined previously now appeared. Former peasants moved to cities where at least a few became managers and, if they were extremely fortunate, rose within the ranks of the party to lead privileged lives. As the Soviet Union made economic progress, it needed more managers and technicians, and at the end of the 1920s the importance of class meant that a humble background was advantageous. This was especially true during the period of the purges.

#### ● Examiner’s hint

An essay question like this is fairly common, as social change plays a significant role in a single-party leader’s domestic policy. When you answer a question like this, however, it is important to include evidence of change. Always try to mention the names of artists or musicians and to know something about their work. Also, be sure that you discuss social policies and not political or economic policies.

#### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

##### QUESTION

**Assess the impact of Stalin’s social and cultural policies on the USSR up to 1941.**

**Here are some extracts from student essays discussing the impact of cultural change.**

##### Student Answer A – Leo

Stalin also wanted to change Soviet culture. He liked art to be used for propaganda and preferred paintings that showed him with Lenin or surrounded by children, but he did not like modern art. He wanted people to read his books such as *The History of the Communist Party* and not novels and poetry. Stalin did like to attend the ballet and composers like Shostakovich were very popular. As long as artists and composers did what they were told to do, they were able to survive and they often lived in large apartments and were part of the elite of Soviet society.



### Examiner's comments

Leo is discussing social policies here and he does mention art and literature as well as music. His paragraph is rather descriptive though. He mentions a composer, but what about writers or poets or artists? There is not much supporting evidence here for his arguments. Also, he does not mention if there was a change of policy or whether it had any impact on the USSR. It may be that Leo has left his analysis of 'change' for the conclusion, in which case, he will not score very well. It is important to refer to the question as you go along.

### Student Answer B – Susan

Another area in which there was change in Soviet culture was in the arts. Stalin understood the importance of music, literature and art and how these could be used to create a 'proletarian culture'. He approved of the music of Prokofiev and Shostakovich and encouraged their compositions. It is not very clear if these composers changed Soviet society in any way, but their music was considered to be very good, even outside the USSR. Also, concert tickets were cheap and everyone was encouraged to appreciate Russian composers, so it was also linked to encouraging nationalism. In literature, the works of Mikhail Sholokhov were available because they were written about the civil war and the revolution. Stalin did not like the poetry of Oscar Mandelstam, though, because his verses spoke about the Terror. By censoring such poetry, Stalin wanted to limit opposition. Stalin liked the people of the USSR to read novels and to look at paintings that were about the lives of workers and peasants and the Writers' Union, for example, made sure that novelists knew what they had to produce.

### Examiner's comments

Susan has written a much fuller paragraph about culture. She has also included the names of several composers and writers, so there is some supporting evidence. Furthermore, there is an attempt at analysis as she tries to assess the impact on Soviet society. She could have said more about censorship and how this helped to control the kind of culture that was made available, but she has kept a focus on the question.

## What were Stalin's aims?

### Securing his own position as the leader of the party and the state

Stalin had removed his rivals from the Politburo by the end of the 1920s. This did not mean that he was in complete control, however, and criticism from **Martemian Riutin** and associates in 1932 showed that Stalin's policies were not always popular with the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Although the 17th Party Congress in 1934 was named the Congress of the Victors, Stalin knew that the Second Five Year Plan had huge difficulties in meeting its targets and the human cost of collectivization was devastating for the countryside. Even more important, others knew this too and were not afraid to voice their concerns.

### Defending the USSR

In Stalin's opinion, the USSR was a fragile state. It did not have a very developed industrialized economy and outside its borders there were many countries that feared the spread of communism. By the early 1930s, fascism was well-established in Italy and Nazism was on the rise in Germany. Both of these very similar ideologies had their roots in

#### **Martemian Ivanovich Riutin (1890–1937)**

Riutin criticized Stalin's overthrow of the collective leadership of the party, saying that this had led to ordinary people's disillusionment with socialism. The radical nature of collectivization had also contributed to Stalin's unpopularity with some leading cadres. Riutin was expelled from the party in 1930 and his associates were expelled in 1932, accused of trying to restore capitalism and of being kulaks. It is claimed that Stalin wanted the death penalty for Riutin, but that Kirov intervened. Riutin was sentenced to ten years' solitary confinement, but was shot in 1937.



### ● Examiner's hint

A common exam question will ask about the aims of single-party leaders and whether or not they were achieved. A typical question may look something like this: 'How successful were Stalin's domestic policies?'

Don't forget that when you have to assess the success of a leader's policies, it is important to start by stating what he intended to achieve. Another important consideration is that a leader may have achieved his aims but at a terrible cost, so was he 'successful'? As you read through this section, consider who may have benefited and who may have suffered from Stalin's policies. Then, when you get to the end, come back to this question and write an essay plan.

### ToK Time

Stalin said, 'The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic.'

Consider how this statement may or may not be valid today. Newspapers, the internet and television carry news stories that cover tragic events on a daily basis. Does the way news is communicated to us reflect Stalin's statement? Is this how we react to the news of a suicide bombing or a train crash?



socialism, but were vehemently opposed to communism. In a war, the USSR would need to defend its borders and have a well-trained and well-equipped army.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTION

**Now you have seen Stalin's aims, how did he go about achieving them and to what extent was he successful?**

### SOURCE G

*Stalin put the matter vividly in 1931: 'To lower the tempo means to lag behind. And laggards [lazy people] are beaten. But we don't want to be beaten. No, we don't want it! The history of old Russia consisted, amongst other things, in her being beaten continually for her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish-Lithuanian nobles. She was beaten by the Anglo-French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. She was beaten by all of them for her backwardness.'*

**From Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, 2003**

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

**In Source G here, Stalin makes many references to Russian history. He does not mention communism at all. What does this suggest to you about how Stalin viewed the USSR? Was it a new, revolutionary state, do you think, or the latest manifestation of the Russian Empire? How would you support your answer?**

## Section III:

# Stalin in power: Establishment and consolidation of authoritarian and single-party states

## Methods: How did Stalin maintain power?

### The Great Terror

The Great Terror of 1936–38 wasn't a domestic policy of Stalin, but it was woven into every aspect of the planned economy and was one of the most important methods by which domestic policies were achieved and opposition suppressed. Punishment was meted out to peasants who resisted collectivization; to factory workers who did not work hard enough; to managers who did not meet targets; and to party members who were considered too passive.

For Stalin, terror was one of his methods of ruling the Soviet Union. It made people afraid, and people who were frightened were more likely to be obedient. If instilling fear was his aim, he certainly achieved it. Even those who were not afraid of Stalin would be frightened of the dangers he told them existed. These included the fear of invasion, the fear of a counter-revolution and the fear of Stalin being removed from power by his enemies. The terror grew as Stalin became more powerful and surrounded himself with supporters in the Politburo and the Central Committee of the party. During the early 1930s, he still had to be cautious and his recommendation in 1933 that Riutin be executed was opposed by

**Sergei Kirov.** Events such as Kirov's murder in 1934 gave Stalin opportunities to purge the Leningrad Party and to introduce new laws. These included, as we have seen, the authority to execute children over 12, and he also removed any system of appeal so that a death sentence would be carried out immediately. It is unlikely that Stalin, without some suitable excuse, would have been able to step up the terror as he did.

The following is a brief list of the purges that were carried out during the 1930s.

- The purge of engineers and managers included the **Shakhty Trials**. The aim was to instil labour discipline and to punish anyone who could be blamed for a failure to achieve quotas.
- The purge of the Communist Party intended to ensure that all members were loyal to Stalin. The purging of the party began after Riutin's criticisms of Stalin's leadership.
- The purge of the leadership of the party that followed the death of Sergei Kirov.
- The **purge of the military** in 1937 that targeted the officers of the armed forces.
- Random quotas issued to local party branches with instructions that 'counter-revolutionaries', kulaks and 'Trotskyites' be imprisoned or executed. Party branches would receive orders to arrest a specific number of enemies of the state, whether these existed or not.

In June 1936, Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had been accused of having plotted Kirov's murder, were tried and executed. Stalin was now targeting influential Bolsheviks who had been members of the party leadership. Genrikh Yagoda, the head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD – the internal security police), objected to the execution of party leaders and then was criticized by Stalin for having started the terror four years too late (Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 2005). In September, 1936, he was replaced by Nikolai Yezhov, a close admirer of Stalin, who followed instructions to prise out enemies within the party. According to Robert Service, 681,692 persons were executed during the two years from 1936 to 1938 (*A History of Modern Russia*, 2003). Bukharin and Rykov were put on trial in 1938 and executed, having confessed to betraying the party. Service considers the unbridled terror to have had a negative impact upon the USSR's economy and its military and that even Stalin recognized that events had gone beyond his control by 1938. Slowly, the 'quotas' were reduced and, finally, Yezhov was demoted, imprisoned and executed in February 1939. It is not clear why Stalin slowed down the process of disposing of imagined enemies, but it is possible that the worsening situation in Europe meant that he had to shift his attention to foreign policy. Yezhov was executed as though to indicate that he had been over-zealous, and the Great Terror was described as the period of *Yezhovchina*.

Historians have argued over the numbers killed as well as the motivation that sparked the process. Mary McAuley, for instance, notes the difficulty of assessing the impact of the terror when the statistics are so unreliable. She also considers the difficulty of accumulating eye-witness memoirs when most people who wrote about their experiences were intellectuals. What, she asks, 'of the peasants and workers and the criminals' who were also imprisoned (McAuley, *Soviet Politics 1917–1991*, 1992)? She notes that Solzhenitsyn argued that the purges were symptomatic of Bolshevik ideology.

## SOURCE A

*Solzhenitsyn argues ... if one believes that class origin determines behaviour and consciousness, if one believes that individuals' actions and ideas are determined by their social origins and that therefore members of the bourgeoisie cannot but act in a particular way, it is only logical to argue that they should be eliminated ... the belief that revolutionary justice should be administered by those with a proper proletarian consciousness, and little else, allowed the riff-raff and sadists of society to staff the penal institutions.*

From Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics 1917–1991*, 1992

## Sergei Kirov (1886–1934)

A close friend of Stalin, Kirov had taken over the administration of the Leningrad Party after the demotion of Zinoviev. A popular member of the leadership, Kirov had gained more votes than Stalin in the elections to the Central Committee in 1934. Soon after, he was murdered by Leonid Nikolaev who, it was alleged, was jealous because his wife had an affair with Kirov. The circumstances surrounding the murder were mysterious and there has always been a suspicion that Stalin ordered the murder, although no proof for this accusation has ever been found. He did use the opportunity, however, to purge the Leningrad Party and to arrest Kamenev and Zinoviev.

### The Shakhty Trials

Named after the town in the Donbass coal-mining region where they took place, these were trials of 'foreign experts' and 'class elements' blamed for breaking machinery and sabotaging the Five Year Plan. Most likely, the breakage was the fault of unskilled workers, but 'experts' were convenient scapegoats. Public trials were held and 11 death sentences handed down, of which five were carried out.

### The purge of the military

The purge of the military in 1937 cut a swathe through the officer ranks of the armed forces. In his unrelenting hunt for career officers who could not be trusted, Stalin executed thousands and put thousands more in prison. This was to lead to problems in 1941, when the early successes of the German invasion were partly due to the absence of experienced officers. It also influenced Britain's reluctance to pursue seriously an alliance with the USSR in 1939.

She then quotes Swianewicz, a Polish economist who:

### SOURCE B

*...offers us a materialist explanation... Economic development necessitates the finding of resources for investment, for holding back consumption. How could this be done? One way to reduce consumption was to withdraw consumers from the market, place them in labour camps where they worked and consumed almost nothing... The labour camps, Swianewicz argues, had an economic rationale.*

From Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics 1917–1991*, 1992

#### Memorial Society

Set up during the period of *perestroika* in the 1980s, this society tried to ensure that the victims of the purges were not forgotten. Its work seemed easier during the 1990s, for instance, than in more recent years, when Orlando Figes' *The Whisperers* was a forbidden publication in Russia. In the early 21st century, the officially approved image of Stalin was that of a great leader who had achieved economic growth and victory in World War II. Historical focus had to be on the positive rather than negative aspects of this rule.

Other historians such as Orlando Figes researched the 1930s in depth, accessing the archive of memoirs collected 'in collaboration with the Memorial Society organised in the late 1980s to represent and commemorate the victims of Soviet repression' (*The Whisperers*, 2007). He estimated that '25 million people were repressed by the Soviet regime between 1928 ... and 1953. These 25 million – people shot by execution squads, Gulag prisoners, "kulaks" sent to "special settlements", slave labourers of various kinds and members of deported nationalities – represent about one-eighth of the Soviet population...' Figes also comments on how, inevitably, in a regime that was so repressive, one survival method was for people to identify so strongly with Stalin that even their punishment could not shake their belief in his righteousness.

### SOURCE C

*Immersion in the Soviet system was a means of survival for most people, including many victims of the Stalinist regime, a necessary way of silencing their doubts and fears, which, if voiced, could make their lives impossible. Believing and collaborating in the Soviet project was a way to make sense of their suffering, which without this higher purpose might reduce them to despair. In the words of (another) 'kulak' child, a man exiled for many years as an 'enemy of the people' who nonetheless remained a convinced Stalinist throughout his life, 'believing in the justice of Stalin ... made it easier for us to accept our punishments, and it took away our fear'.*

From Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers*, 2007

### SOURCE D

*'... a true Bolshevik will readily cast out from his mind ideas in which he has believed for years. A true Bolshevik has submerged his personality in the collectivity, "the Party", to such an extent that he can make the necessary effort to break away from his own opinions and convictions... He would be ready to believe that black was white and white was black, if the Party required it.'*

Yuri Piatakov quoted in Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers*, 2007

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### QUESTIONS

- How could you use Source C to support an argument that Stalin continued to be revered even by those he punished?
- Why, do you think, did this happen?
- How could you use Sources C and D to agree/disagree with the following assertion, 'Stalin had total control over the population of the Soviet Union'?